

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CGEN SOPN PROP CSCE US UR
SUBJECT: WHITNEY/PIPER SLANDER CASE

REF: (A) MOSCOW 15808, (B) MOSCOW 15452

1. WHITNEY/PIPER SLANDER CASE HEARINGS RESUMED 11:00
LOCAL TIME JULY 18. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, NEITHER NEWS-
MAN WAS PRESENT SINCE BOTH HAD INFORMED PRESIDING JUDGE
(ALMAZOV) JULY 3 AT LAST HEARING THAT THEY DECLINED TO
TAKE ANY FURTHER PART IN PROCEEDINGS. BOTH ARE CUR-
RENTLY IN U.S. ON VACATION.

2. COURT SESSION BROKE FOR LUNCH AT APPROXIMATELY 12:30,
AND WE ARE ADVISED OF FOLLOWING DETAILS BY LOCAL BUREAU
OF AMERICAN NEWS AGENCY WHOSE REPORTER COVERED MORNING'S
ACTIVITIES:

--COURT DECIDED TO PROCEED WITH CASE DESPITE ABSENCE OF
DEFENDENTS;

--PROSECUTION DEMANDS THAT CORRESPONDENTS BE FINED TOTAL
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OF 2,280.70 RUBLES (WE UNDERSTOOD MAXIMUM FINE TO BE
300 RUBLES, BUT PROSECUTION'S DEMAND IS SAID TO INCLUDE
"COURT COSTS"), THAT THEY BE MADE TO APOLOGIZE PUBLICLY
AND PRINT RETRACTIONS IN THEIR PAPERS, AND (MOST
OMINOUSLY) THAT COURT SEND LETTER TO MFA RECOMMENDING
THAT TWO NEWSMEN'S ACCREDITATION BE WITHDRAWN;

--GAMSAKHURDIA HIMSELF WAS PRODUCED IN COURT AND HE CONFIRMED THAT HE HAD MADE "CONFESSION" AIRED BY GOSTELERADIO.

3. OUR UNDERSTANDING IS THAT SESSION WILL RESUME IN AFTERNOON. WE WILL REPORT FURTHER DETAILS AS THEY BECOME KNOWN TO US.

4. COMMENT: IN HIGHLY UNUSUAL MOVE, MFA PRESS DEPT. PHONED LOCAL UPI BUREAU CHIEF LATE ON JULY 17 AND NOTIFIED HIM THAT POOL OF TEN AMERICAN NEWSMEN WOULD BE ADMITTED TO COVER TODAY'S COURT SESSION. MFA REQUESTED UPI'S ASSISTANCE IN ASSEMBLING POOL, AND UPI IN FACT CALLED AROUND TO LOCAL BUREAUS TO PUT TOGETHER POOL. CLEAR IMPRESSION IS THAT SOVIETS WANT TODAY'S "TRIAL" QUICKLY AND ACCURATELY REPORTED TO U.S. OUR INITIAL IMPRESSION (BEFORE SESSION BEGAN) WAS THAT THIS MIGHT BE TO SECURE FAVORABLE PUBLICITY FOR POSSIBLE MILD SOVIET APPROACH, BUT IF DETAILS AS RELAYED TO US BY SOURCE IN PARA TWO ARE CORRECT, MOST LIKELY RATIONALE IS PRESENCE AND ROLE OF GAMSAKHURDIA. ALTHOUGH PREDICTION (REF A) THAT CHARGES WILL EVENTUALLY BE FOUND TO BE BEYOND COURT'S COMPETENCE COULD STILL BE BORNE OUT, DEVELOPMENTS THIS MORNING HAVE BEEN DECIDEDLY UNENCOURAGING. MATLOCK

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